



Humphreys Promote Leadership

Text and photographs by DIPESH SATAPATHY



A fellowship in honor of former Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey trains potential leaders.

The career of Subodh K. Gupta, an engineer working with rural development NGO Pradaan in Jharkhand, took an upward turn after he was granted a Humphrey Fellowship in 1999-2000. It allowed him to pursue a 10-month course at Cornell University in finance, banking and economic development. After his return, he moved to Hyderabad where he used his new knowledge as a consultant and later to set up his own company, Safal Solutions (P) Ltd., which develops software applications for providing services in rural areas. "The fellowship broadened my views on how things happen," says Gupta.

The Humphrey Fellowships Program was started in 1978 to encourage leadership in fields critical to the engagement of the United States with developing countries. In India, the program is administered by the U.S. Educational Foundation in India (USEFI). It aims to initiate ties between Americans and their professional counterparts in other countries. Primarily funded by the U.S. Department of State, its mandate under the Fulbright Program is "to help educate a core group

of a new generation of world leaders.” The program’s name honors the public service career of Hubert H. Humphrey, the former U.S. Vice President and Senator. According to Adnan A. Siddiqi, counselor for cultural affairs at the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, “Humphrey was chosen because his was an acquired, methodical and unassuming kind of leadership.”

Humphrey was a Democrat from Minnesota who had been a teacher, radio commentator and mayor of Minneapolis before being elected to the Senate in 1948. He was Vice President under President Lyndon B. Johnson from 1964 to 1968. After losing the 1968 presidential election to Richard Nixon, Humphrey returned to Minnesota as a university teacher. He returned to the Senate in 1971, remaining until his death in 1978.

The Humphrey Program focuses on mid-career professionals, aged 35 to 40, offering non-degree programs at U.S. universities in public administration, finance and banking, economic development, public health, journalism, education planning, natural resources and environment, law and human rights and technology policy. The fellows work in groups to develop leadership and other skills to “bring about change and make a difference,” says Michelle Johnson, senior program officer at the State Department’s Office of Global Education Programs in Washington, D.C. In the past 26 years, 105 Indians have received Humphrey fellowships, the highest for any country. Worldwide, the program has benefited more than 3,000 professionals from 140 countries.

“If you are a Humphrey [fellow], it matters little to the common man. But *you* feel different,” says Amit Chakrabarty, additional professor of pharmacology and epidemiology at Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical Sciences in Gangtok. He was a fellow at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore in 2002-03.

The opportunity for professional growth is what interested Vini Mahajan, director in the Prime Minister’s Office. She was a fellow in 2000-01 at the American University in Washington, D.C., where she studied economics and public finance. “I spent six months at the World Bank on infrastructure issues and could understand a little the functioning of the U.S. government,” she says.

The fellows study leadership theory in a weekly seminar on campus and in special sessions organized by the Institute of

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International Education (IIE) in New York, a private nonprofit educational exchange agency, and other organizations. The fellows interact with American grass-roots activists, private sector and NGO leaders, journalists and opinion makers.

The Humphrey fellows design their own individual programs, do extensive networking and information gathering and ultimately secure for themselves a six-week work experience, called a professional affiliation,

with a U.S.-based organization. They volunteer for community activities such as fairs, festivals, cultural performances and teaching assignments and learn how to lead. They exchange impressions on their strengths, weaknesses, cultures and potential and get first-hand experience of the American business, political and social systems.

“I have become more confident and have learnt the value of friendship and networking,” says Rupsikha Borah, chief manager, finance and accounts, at Oil India Limited and a fellow at Boston University in 2003-04. Broadening of vision, exposure to new technology, networking with U.S. professionals and work experience with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1991-92 helped Anand Chiplunkar, founder chairman of AIHF and senior vice president of IL&FS Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited in New Delhi. “It gave me a better and closer understanding of the problems and priorities of different countries,” he says. “The multi-cultural exposure within the Humphrey Fellows and in the U.S. was certainly enriching. It made me more sensitive to behavioral and social issues.”

The program does not have any country or regional quotas. The number of participants changes every year depending on the budget allocated by the U.S. Congress. The amount was

Opposite page, top: Participants at the Third South Asia Regional Conference of Humphrey Fellows held at Agra in April.

Below: Indian Humphrey fellows, (from left) Dr. Amit Chakrabarty, professor at Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical Sciences; Doordarshan Program Director Usha Bhasin; retired IAS officer Babu Jacob; Subodh K. Gupta, who set up Safal Solutions in Hyderabad; Rupsikha Borah, chief manager, finance and accounts, Oil India Limited; and Vini Mahajan, director in the Prime Minister’s Office.





From left: Association of Indian Humphrey Fellows (AIHF) Treasurer Gopi Nath Ghosh; Judith Babbits, assistant director of Humphrey Fellowship Division at the Institute of International Education in Washington, D.C.; Michelle Johnson, senior program officer at the Office of Global Education Programs in Washington, D.C.; and AIHF Secretary Dr. Nimish G. Desai at the Agra Fort.

\$9 million for the 2004-05 academic year. The multistage selection process is quite complicated, explains Johnson. In each participating country, the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy, or the Fulbright Commission accepts applications in various fields that best fit the local context. After interviews, selected applications are sent to Washington, D.C., where review panels compare them on a regional basis. After an additional round of scrutiny, about two-thirds are considered for final selection. "We do not decide on numbers per country; we look at the strongest applications. The decisions are made on the strength of the candidate," Johnson says.

Fellows are professionals in their chosen fields, not academics, like most Fulbrighters. "The other unique thing about this program is that we do not have any expectations. We do not say you have to write a report," says Judith Babbits, assistant director of the Humphrey Fellowship Division at IIE. The universities compete to get fellows and every five years they re-compete. About \$60,000 is spent on a fellow, including maintenance, air fare, monthly allowance and expenses for professional development, such as a conference trip, and the six-week practical experience.

Johnson, Babbits, Siddiqi and Gupta were among 50 participants at the Third South Asia Regional Conference of Humphrey Fellows at Agra in April. The conference on "Leadership for Public Service" was attended by fellows from 10 countries and organized by the Association of Indian Humphrey Fellows (AIHF), which formally registered last year. The first such conference was organized at Seoul in 2001 and the second at Kathmandu in 2002. Some of the Indian members sit on selection panels and mentor prospective fellows. Babbits

Right: AIHF Founder Chairman Anand Chiplunkar. Far right: Cultural Affairs Counselor Adnan A. Siddiqi.



says the Fellowship Program wants to support any kind of alumni association that fellows organize locally.

According to Johnson, the program instills a sense of greater confidence, helps the fellows present themselves better and suggests different methods of persuasion, problem solving and thinking.

The first two fellows from India were Indian Administrative Service officers, Ravi Mohan Sethi and Sitaraman Gurumurthi, in 1979-80. Sethi went to Boston University and Gurumurthi to Pennsylvania State University. Both studied public administration. Babu Jacob, who retired as chief secretary to the Government of Kerala and is now adviser to the state government on urban renewal projects, went to Colorado State University as a fellow in 1980-81 to study economic development. "The program allowed a considerable amount of flexibility. One could better appreciate the economic linkages with different sectors," he says.

Doordarshan's Program Director Usha Bhasin was a fellow at the University of Maryland at College Park in 1996-97. "It has been so wonderfully designed that it helps you to do what you want to do. At the same time it opens new windows to many areas about which you haven't thought," she says. After the fellowship, she started working on media research and got a short-term consultancy at the World Bank.

Gopi Nath Ghosh, assistant representative of the Food and Agricultural Organization in New Delhi, credits his 1986-87 fellowship with his advancement from a district manager at the National Dairy Development Board. "The most interesting component was the professional visits to various agriculture and agribusiness entities and the internship with the National Coop Business Association that allowed me to interact with many stalwarts in the field across the United States," he says.

According to USEFT's deputy director, Jamshed A. Siddiqui, the number of fellows has been increasing since 2001-02, when six Indians were selected. Eight were selected for 2004-05 and nine for 2005-06. About a quarter of all Indian Humphrey fellows have been women. In the past, mostly Indian civil servants were nominated, but since the late 1980s, there have been more professionals from the public, private and NGO sectors. "We would like to get people who are from outside the major cities, from rural areas," Babbits says.

With joint funding from IIE and the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the Alumni Impact Awards were started in 2001 to further expand opportunities for Humphrey alumni. Four to five such awards are given every year. In 2003, the Program adopted online learning.

"Next year we have been asked to submit more names. Even a tiny country like Bhutan is being offered three fellowships this year, which is a great development. We are hoping that the U.S. government will put more money into the Humphrey fellowship," says Adnan Siddiqi. □